



Negative Humour and Connotations of the Comics: Tintumon Jokes as Visual Literature

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *Tintumon is the titular hero of one of the most popular jokes titled Tintumon Comics in Malayalam. Tintumon is not just a comic strip hero to the new generation Mallus and other Keralites. He is the incarnation of the phenomenal shifts and updated trends in the heart of the children and young adults of Kerala or Tintumon is the foster child of the new generation in Kerala. Tintumon jokes began to appear as text messages in mobile phones following the trends of Sardarji Jokes. But later Tintumon conquered E-Mails and internet and new generation media like Orkut, Facebook and Whatsapp. Side by side, Tintumon Jokes began to appear as cartoon strip entries, comic book entries, and as books with exclusive collection of Tintumon jokes. Though his age is below four years in many comics, the lack of respect for elders, the self centered attitude, vulgar dialogues and the distorted re-interpretation of the context within which he appears deprecate his sense of humour rather than glorifying his genuine innocence. In many occasions the belittling messages he communicates are anti humanistic and anti social rather than a thought provoking, anti traditional and progressive comics.*

Negative Humour and Connotations of Comics: Tintumon Jokes as Visual Literature

"the structure, cognition, and development of comic's visual language is similar to that of spoken and signed languages. Structured sequential images can literally become a Visual Language"

Neil Cohn, Ph.D in Psychology
Tufts University

Tintumon is the titular hero of one of the most popular jokes titled Tintumon Comics in Malayalam language. In most comic pieces he appears as an LKG Student with keen observation, critical insight, and witty dialogues. Though his age is below 4 years in many comics, the lack of respect for elders, the self centered attitude, vulgar dialogues and the distorted re-interpretation of the context within which he appears deprecate his sense of humour rather than glorifying his genuine innocence. In many occasions the belittling messages he communicates are anti humanistic and anti social rather than thought provoking, anti traditional and progressive.

Tintumon is not just a comic strip hero to the new generation Mallus and other Keralites. He is the incarnation of the phenomenal shifts and updated trends in the heart of the children and young adults of Kerala or Tintumon enjoys the status of a metaphorical brand ambassador of the new gen culture in Kerala. Overcoming the limits of a titular hero of comic strip, Tintumon celebrates popularity and acceptability in almost all media. Compared to other contemporary heroes of comics like Boban and Molley, Shupanti, Unnikuttan and Mantoos of the popular Children's Weeklies and Magazines in Malayalam, Tintumon negates the limits of time and space. While other comics have certain authorship, Tintumon is an 'orphan child' in the field of comics. In this regard he is the mouth piece of the new generation.

It is interesting to note here the fact that the details of genesis of such a titular hero still remain anonymous and

unexplored. The gist of the maximum authentic biographical details available is Tintumon was born and brought up during the heydays of Mobile Text Messages. There are so many controversies among some mainstream cartoonists and book publishers regarding the authorship of Tintumon, and they share different versions of biography. In this context, the commonly accepted claim is that Tintumon is the foster child of the new generation in Kerala.

There are contradictions in the portrayal of Tintu too. According to the most recent updates available on virtual media, for example, on Whatsapp, the recently popular media, Tintu appears as grown up and is a middle aged employee. By locating Tintu in different media, representing different agegroups and in different roles, Tintumon episodes have been developing, from that of a mischievous male child, through an unemployed new - gen guy to a middle aged man. But it is interesting to note here that the apparent change in presentation never influence the logical paradigms of humour or the thought level of Tintumon.

Just as in oral tradition Tintumon is growing day by day. While some just circulate the comic piece, others may edit, by adding or exaggerating the context according to their experience and temperament and update it on the new age media. To most of the contributors the titular hero is Tintumon, but there are Tin2 Mon, Tintu, Master Tintu variations in naming. The majority of Tintumon jokes are ascribed on him by the fans themselves. So the author to reader and reader to writer distance in the case of Tintumon comics may be barely traceable. While most of them are practical incidents taken from everyday life, some are out dated jokes in new bottle, taken from Sardarji jokes or from some other comic books. Celebrating the potential of such a colloquial comic strip there are some comic scenes in Malayalam films, the source of which may be attributed to Tintumon Jokes.

A systematic study of comics should contribute to the problematic perceptual, conceptual, verbal and graphic

world within the comic texts. In such an analysis the historical and philosophical features of the comic strips may unveil the facts and follies of the contemporary life. As mentioned in the beginning, Tintumon jokes began to appear as text messages in mobile phones following the trends of Sardarji Jokes. But later Tintumon conquered e-mails and internet and new generation media like Orkut, Facebook and Whatsapp. Side by side, Tintumon Jokes began to appear as cartoon strip entries, comic book entries, and as books with exclusive collection of Tintumon jokes. Now, there are animated versions of Tintumon Jokes and even different websites, blogs and facebook pages dedicated by Tintumon fans. Within the time Tintumon jokes glorified by some television channels as cartoon series and this trend was timely recognized by advertising agencies and exploited the branded orphan character to persuade children and young adults alike. In this way Tintu gave opportunities to the public to present their experience and emotions, the ever memorable humorous and witty episodes, and even their whims and fancies on the new age media.

One of the important episodes in Tintu's growth from text messages to Whatsapp images records the changes in sensibility among Malayalam readers. The lack of a visual format for a mischievous popular comic character has been compensated within the time. The shift marks the importance of image or visual representation in our everyday life. The reflections of greed for visuals can be seen in the dissemination of images in advertisements on different media, popularity of television, films, exclusive contents of photography in newspapers and magazines and the variety and possibilities of visuals in computer, internet and videogames. The significance of visual displays in the everyday connotes the vital role of images in visual signification of a commodity in contemporary life. In this regard images, as Jameson suggests, becomes a pseudo ideal and such a capitalist consumerist paradigm focus on visuals and not on the quality of the commodity.

While one re reads and rethink an entity, if it the enquiry is genuine, there may arise some oft repeated questions, which may dismantle one's always already conditioned sense and sensibility. In the context of analysis of the negative role of Tintumon comics, the questions on the plus elements in Tintumon comics in winning such popularity is relevant. What is special in such a character compared to other comic heroes before its entry into the market? What are the direct or indirect messages communicated through such discourses? Here lies the significance of the analysis of such a comic strip as part of visual literature.

Negation is an important concept in literature and culture. One's culture and belief system play important role in the negation of an existing system. In materialist dialectics, according to the Dictionary of Philosophy, Negation is regarded as a necessary moment of development, a condition for qualitative change of things. The qualitative change is decided by the members of that distinctive community. Such a change in taste and trends reflects the inappropriateness of the existing system, the fishers in the existing system, which may connote the need for a new entity, a new system and a new format of representation of the contemporary life world. The contemporary system of signification within a community connotes the public wisdom and the intellectual level of the ordinary members of the society. Through the interaction and negotiation, the folk maintain their social relationships. As one's attitude changes, the life world itself alters and the change finally reflects within the system.

While the conventional approach to comics as a powerful medium to instruct and imbibe value based episodes is healthy and creative, after the wake of globalization the shocking shifts in paradigms are threats to values and are destructive. For example, during the heydays of Amar Chithra Katha there was a nationwide awakening and positive attitude towards the cultural heritage of the nation. Significant episodes in the cultural history of India have been inculcated within the episodes and were within the reach of school children.

While a school going child listen to the animated version of Tintumon comics or while a young adult reader goes through the Tintumon Comics book, there are biased and distorted versions of history of our nation tinted in subversive and negative humour. Meanwhile other jokes depart from the memory after gratification, these political images conditions the child reader and compels him or her to look down upon the native culture. Instead of educating the budding generation about the traditional values and cultural heritage of the nation, the negative elements within some comics instills distorted values and make them mud-headed citizens of tomorrow.

Tintumon's comments distorting the words of great men like Jesus, Gandhiji, Sree Narayana Guru, the disapproving comments on freedom struggle, underwriting dialogues on parents, his views on humanities, lack of respect for grandpa, dismissive attitude towards education, vulgar dialogues on classmates, parents, teachers etc. communicates negative messages to the young generation. As if legitimizing, he presents vices tinted in humorous 'techy' language.

The metaphorical encroachment of the mixed cultural signs in comics, cartoons, advertisements, games and animation movies seem to negate the traditional healthy paradigms and most of them communicates unbaked thoughts and may lead to cultural decline of the nation. The observations of an artist aiming the creation of comics should encompass almost every aspect of cultural life in the region. Apart from focusing on the easy roots of popularity, artist has the responsibility to educate and to offer entertainment to the reader. An artist should update the changing taste and trends in regional culture, changing approaches to different institutions, festivals, customs and rituals. Negating the cultural roots of a nation will indirectly lead to inferiority and shameless appropriation of a foreign culture. Only then as visual literature, comics can invite readers to look at the empirical world in a different light, negating the conventions of normative perception.